

Cow Creeks' Seven Feathers Casino opened in April, 1992, the first Indian gaming business in Oregon, and rose from the gravel and remnants of an old hotel property to become a destination casino, hotel, and spa.



Indian Gaming in Oregon

BY STEPHEN DOW BECKHAM

In 1990 legal counsel for the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua negotiated the first gaming compact in Oregon under IGRA. The tribe began modestly with a bingo hall in a metal warehouse. Today its Seven Feathers Casino, Hotel, Spa, and RV Park are a Mecca for travelers on Interstate 5, the north-south travel corridor between Canada and Mexico. Eight other Oregon tribes have secured compacts and established gaming businesses in the state. The fortunes of the casinos have been a matter of the “luck of the draw.” Some trust lands are so isolated that the operations have been modest. Other tribes have benefitted by locations convenient to urban populations or major travel corridors.

In 1956 Congress “terminated” all western Oregon tribes and bands and the Klamath Tribe in south-central Oregon. As part of the Termination process, the Department of Interior sold all reservation lands and fee-patented allotments. When the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (1988) was passed, the state’s “terminated tribes” had but one option to try to do gaming. They had to qualify under Section 2719(b)(1)(A) that permitted gaming to occur on lands meeting three conditions. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community, Confederated Tribes of Siletz, Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw, Coquille Tribe, Cow Creek Band

of Umpqua Tribe, and Klamath Tribe all had to document how they qualified under this special section of IGRA. Sometimes the documentation took years, litigation in federal court, or legislation by Congress. Eventually all of the “Terminated” tribes obtained lands qualifying for gaming.

Three tribes—Warm Springs, Umatilla, and Burns Paiute—were able to secure gaming compacts for lands held in trust prior to 1988. Initially the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs opened a casino at its resort-hotel at Kah-nee-tah Hot Springs. The site, however, was eighteen miles off the main highway in central Oregon and catered primarily to recreation-seekers at the hot springs and golf course. Thus in 2012 the tribe built the Indian Head Casino on Highway 26 at Warm Springs, Oregon. The casino offers slots, table games, an entertainment venue, and two cafes.

The Burns Paiute tribe in 1998 opened the Old Camp Casino and RV Park. Because of its location, the business was small: 75 slots, 2 poker tables, and a deli. Managers eliminated the table games and added another 100 slot machines. The casino for a time had more than 70 employees. It closed in 2012 because of structural concerns about the inflatable building.

The Confederated Tribes of Umatilla in 2009 constructed

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Indian Head Casino, Warm Springs, Oregon.

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a handsome casino-hotel complex on their reservation at Mission, Oregon, near Pendleton. The site draws travelers on I-84, the east-west freeway across the Columbia Plateau, as well as the residents of Pasco-Kennewick-Richland, the tri-cities in southeastern Washington. The Wild Horse hotel rises ten stories and has 242 guest rooms. It affords panoramic views of the nearby Blue Mountains. The casino has a full complement of slots and table games. Wild Horse also caters to conferences with several meetings rooms and visitor services.

Spirit Mountain Casino, the largest in Oregon, is operated by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. It is located at Grand Ronde, Oregon, on the far west side of the Willamette Valley next to Highway 18, a major travel route to the Oregon Coast. Spirit Mountain is a destination resort

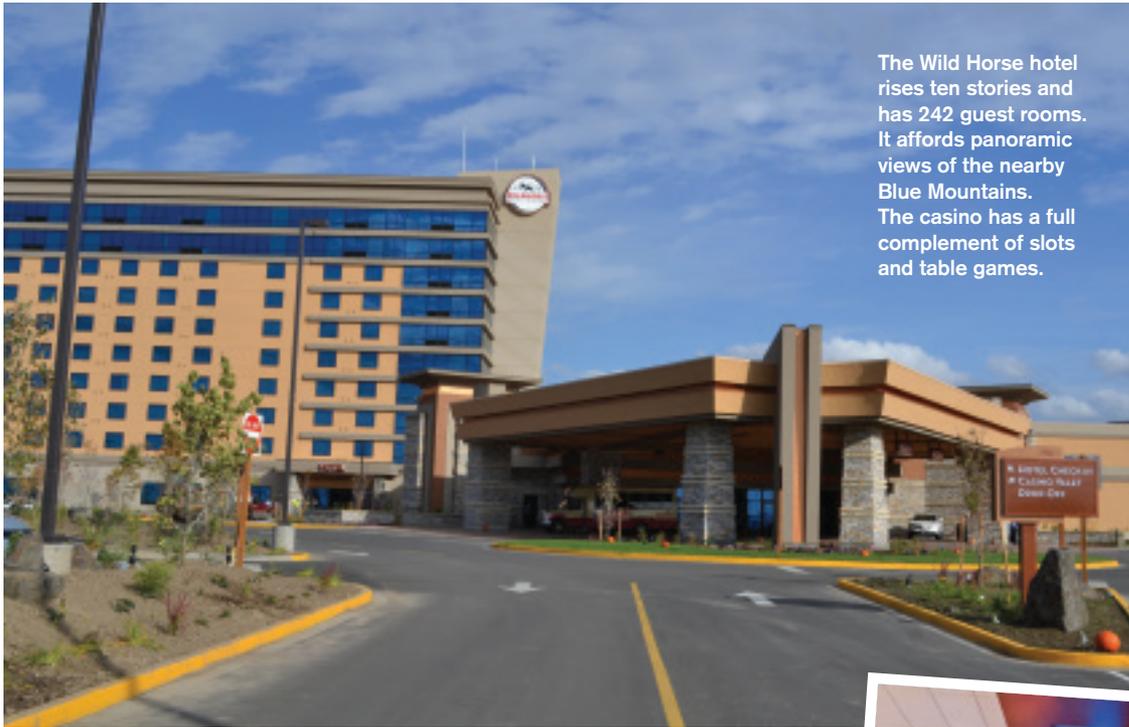
with gaming, 254-room hotel, and convention and conference services. It has 2,000 slot machines and blackjack, craps, poker, pai gow poker, roulette, and keno. The entertainment venues annually draw thousands. Among those performing at Spirit Mountain are Tanya Tucker, Randy Travis, Tony Bennett, Don Rickles, Toni Braxton, Boyz II Men, Neil Sedaka, Dana Carvey, Merle Haggard, Smokey Robinson, Bill Engvall, Wanda Sykes, Sugar Ray, and Chris Isaak. The Spirit Mountain Community Fund since 1997 has distributed more than \$50 million for projects in eleven counties in northwest Oregon.

Not all is well for casino tribes. *The Economist* in the article "Of Slots and Sloth" reported on January 15, 2015, "a new study in the *American Indian Law Journal* suggests that growing tribal gaming revenues can make poverty worse. The study looks at two dozen tribes in the Pacific northwest between 2000 and 2010. During that time, casinos owned by those tribes doubled their total annual take in real terms, to \$2.7 billion. Yet the tribes' mean poverty rate rose from 25% to 29%." The study found that health problems, drug and alcohol abuse, and the prevalence of minimum-wage jobs associated with tribal businesses were contributing factors to persistent poverty.



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Stephen Dow Beckham

“When Oregon Indian tribes place land into trust, it allows them to conduct business there that they couldn’t otherwise, including enterprises that are off-limits to non-Indians—building a casino, for example. ”

—Winston Ross, “New Federal Law,”
Statesman Journal (Salem, Oregon), January 18, 2011



Oregon Indian Gaming

- Chinook Winds Casino & Convention Center, Lincoln City, OR
- Indian Head Casino, Warm Springs, OR
- Kla-mo-Ya Casino, Chiloquin, OR
- The Mill Casino Hotel, North Bend, OR
- Seven Feathers Casino Resort, Canyonville, OR
- Spirit Mountain Casino, Grand Ronde, OR
- Three Rivers Casino Resort, Florence, OR
- Wildhorse Resort & Casino, Mission, OR

Indian gaming in Oregon has generated thousands of jobs. Even more importantly it has extended important social and medical services into rural areas. Tribes have established comprehensive health clinics and pharmacies serving both tribal members and employees. They provide ambulance services, fire protection, and policing. They have helped broaden Oregon tourism. Spirit Mountain Casino surpassed Multnomah Falls as the “most visited place in Oregon.” The income generated by Indian gaming in the state has fostered a new future for many tribal members and important employment for others. ❁

Stephen Dow Beckham earned his M.A. and Ph.D. at UCLA in history. He taught college students for forty-three years, and for many years was the Pamplin Professor of History at Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon. He is the author of numerous books and articles, is a former “Oregon Professor of the Year,” and winner of the American Historical Association’s Distinguished Teaching Award. He has been retained as an expert witness in thirty-seven cases. Most of his legal work relates to Indian gaming, treaty rights, and land claims. His consulting has involved the Delaware Nation, Eastern Pequot, Duwamish, Cowlitz, Chinook, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua, Quapah, Ottawa Nation, Karuk, Mechoopda, Chemehuevi, three bands of Pomo of California, Chinook, and other tribes and bands.